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Extrajudicial Killing of Ahwazis in Iran Continues Despite UN Condemnation

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Brief Analysis

On July 18, 2019 Javaid Rehman, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, [reported](#) that “Arab Ahwazis have continued to be subjected to violations of their rights.... [as] Iranian authorities have reportedly applied broad national security laws to target human rights defenders and activists.” Since this announcement, extrajudicial killings of Ahwazi Arabs—activists and non-activists alike—has continued, representing a deteriorating situation in Iran for Ahwazi Arabs.

Local human rights groups have confirmed that in the past several weeks alone, at least four young Ahwazi men have been killed and a number of other young men have been seriously wounded at checkpoints after being shot by Sāzmān-e Basij-e Mostaz'afin, or Basij, a paramilitary arm of the designated terrorist Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

On September 4, 17-year-old [Ali Rashedi](#) was riding his motorcycle in the Ahwazi city of Khalafiyeh when he rode past one of many purported checkpoints manned by IRGC affiliate forces. For the ‘crime’ of failing to stop at a poorly marked checkpoint, he was shot in the back and neck and killed. According to local human rights groups and video, local Ahwazis protested immediately, which was suppressed by arrests.

This type of attack is terrifyingly commonplace for Ahwazis in Iran. On August 19, 24-year-old Rasoul Afrawi met the same fate as the teenage Ali. Three days earlier, 28 year old Bassem Alboghobesh was shot and killed on his motorcycle in the Ahwazi city of Fallehiyeh by IRGC-linked forces, with his passenger also wounded. Three days before that, on August 13, another young Ahwazi man in his twenties, [Mohammed Oudeh Sari](#), was gunned down by Basiji paramilitary in Ahwaz City while riding his motorcycle. And two days before, 19-year old [Abbas Amiri](#) and his

cousin were driving from Ahwaz City to visit friends to celebrate the Eid al-Adha holiday in Toster city when their car was fired upon by Basiji forces, who later claimed that the vehicle was speeding, though witnesses who rushed to help dispute this claim.

This pattern of road-killings, while on the rise, is not a new phenomenon. On June 22, a motorcyclist identified as Hamza Saaduni was shot in the head and instantly killed by a police officer in Ahwaz City after ignoring the officer's order to stop. In December 20, 2018, 19-year-old Mehdi Sawari was shot at close range by regime military personnel while returning to his family's home in the impoverished Seyed Karim neighborhood of Ahwaz City, and died shortly after. On August 16, 2018, 22-year-old Sajad Zergani and his friend were fired upon by IRGC forces without warning in the Zawiya neighborhood of Ahwaz City; Sajad died shortly thereafter from his wounds.

Nor have these attacks been limited to Ahwaz City which is the regional capital of Ahwaz region. On October 24, 2017, police opened fire on the vehicle of Abbas Hassan Mashal Al-Sari and his wife Zahor Abdul-Sada Al-Sari, wounding both. In the aftermath, Abbas was arrested for unsubstantiated alleged crimes, while their three year old Raghad Abbas, who had been in the back of the car, died instantly.

Both national and international law suggest that the victims' families should be able to hold the shooters accountable for these killings. Article 62 of the 1991 Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran [states](#) that "Resistance against security and police forces whilst performing their duties shall not be considered defense; however, if such forces exceed the scope of their duties and, on the basis of reasons and circumstances, there is a fear that their actions may cause death or injury or violation of honor or chastity, then, defense shall be permissible." And two years ago, the United Nations Human Rights Council [reiterated](#) that it remains "the obligation of all States to conduct exhaustive and impartial investigations into all suspected cases of extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions."

In practice, however, the IRGC has unfettered power across all elements of Iranian government, including its dependent judiciary. It is therefore practically impossible to prove that the IRGC's subsidiary forces ever exceed the scope of their nebulously defined duties, particularly when Ahwazi Arabs are the victims.

Victims' families have confirmed this discrepancy. In the case of Abbas Amiri and his cousin, their family told Ahwazi rights groups that, although they have retained counsel in an attempt to take legal action against the security personnel responsible for Abbas' death, the Iranian legal system invariably excuses the actions of any and all IRGC-linked groups.

The deaths themselves are the result of a broader system of extortion that targets Ahwazi Arabs in Iran. Human rights activists in Ahwaz have documented that the IRGC routinely uses checkpoints as tools to extort money from citizens, especially Ahwazis who are readily identifiable as Arabs rather than ethnic Persians. Drivers are stopped and accused of fabricated 'crimes,' then forced to pay bribes to avoid arrest. Those who refuse to pay these extortion rackets, or who simply drive past checkpoints, may face live gunfire.

Moreover, those who do survive these attacks, and are subsequently arrested, face an equally tragic fate. As one of the authors has [documented](#) at length, Young Ahwazi men arrested by the regime are routinely tortured, often dying as a result. 26-year-old Benyamin Alboghbiash, 20-year-old [Hatem Marmadi](#), 50-year-old [Ali Sawari](#), 35-year-old [Mohammed Odeh Hammadi](#), [Satar Sayahi](#), known as Abu Srour, [Ali Batrani](#), 38-year-old [Gheiban Abidawi](#), 45-year-old [Jameel Suwaidi](#), 20-year-old [Nasser Alboshoka](#), and [Mohammad Kaabi](#) are but a small sample of Ahwazis and other political prisoners who were taken to Iranian prisons.

Those involved in promoting Ahwazi culture are targeted specifically. Cultural activists Naji Sawari, Moher Dassoumi, Ahmed Daghagheleh were arrested and subjected to months of torture in the regime's infamous Sheyban prison; their 'crime' was to create institutes [dedicated to preserving](#) Ahwazi Arab culture. Ghazi Mozher Heideri has written a chilling account of what he endured while in the equally infamous Karoun prison, and of the [methadone](#)

[zombies](#) deliberately created by the regime as a form of torture.

Ahwazi prisoners have also been forced to issue ‘confessions’ for fabricated ‘crimes’ and are subsequently executed. In some cases, the bodies of those executed—whether after show trials or simply in the dead of night—were returned or found thrown into the Karoon River bearing visible marks of torture. Other families were simply called in the middle of the night and told that their loved ones had died, but that their [bodies would never be released](#) for burial or mourning. Those who are fortunate enough to survive their torture and imprisonment are often left with permanent, debilitating injuries.

Extrajudicial killings are not a new practice, but the situation is getting worse. Two years ago, on August 24, 2017, the previous United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran [reported](#) that she had been provided with information regarding “about 45 cases involving the arrest and detention of Ahwazi Arabs” and that “Most of the cases seem to have taken place after participation in cultural and traditional events or protests against environmental degradation.”

The Secretary-General was speaking of [impunity](#), defined as “Exemption or protection from penalty or punishment.” It is the antithesis of the Rule of Law, which encompasses four areas: equality under the law, transparency of law, independent judiciary, and accessible legal remedy.

Under its current regime, Iran cannot legitimately claim to meet these criteria, especially where Ahwazi Arabs are concerned. The Iranian judiciary functions as an arm of the IRGC, and legal remedies are but a hazy mirage to the families of the regime’s many victims, who know that trying to any attempted legal action is more likely to result in their own imprisonment and torture than a fair trial.

This impunity must be clearly identified and rejected, and the racism of the Iranian regime must be held to account by the international community. As Sheikh Abdullah Al Khazaal, grandson of the last independent ruler of the Ahwazi people has [recently made clear](#), recognising the historical right of the Ahwazi people to their homeland serves the interests of the coalition trying to compel the Iranian regime to end its decades-long suppression of its own citizens and exportation of its terroristic ideology in order to destabilize the Middle East and beyond. While UN reports are a step in the right direction, they are evidently not enough—that Iran will not willingly comply with international standards for human rights must be acknowledged and underscored.

Given the current international pressures already directed at the Iranian regime, the time is ripe for the free world to take concrete steps to force the regime to cease its pattern of abuses. There are ten million Ahwazis in Iran who are perpetual targets of a vicious bigoted regime, and this will remain the case unless the international community chooses to pressure Iran to stop this targeting. Decisive action must be taken, leaving no loophole for the regime to exploit in order to continue its heinous and illegal practices. ❖



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